

Spiritual Ignorance causeth Men to
counter-act their doctrinal Know-
ledge.

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A
DISCOURSE

From ACTS xiii. 27.

By ISAAC BACKUS,
Pastor of a Church of CHRIST, in *Middleborough*.

TIT. i. 16. *They profess that they know God;
but in Works they deny him.*



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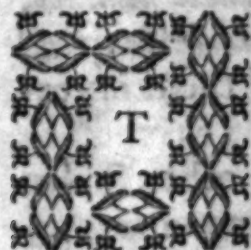
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A DISCOURSE, &c.

ACTS xiii, 47.

For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their Rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the Voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath-Day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

HE great Apostle of the Gentiles in his Travels with his Companions, coming to *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, they went into the *Jewish* Synagogue, and found them more candid than many of their Brethren elsewhere: For, after going through their usual Forms, they set open the Door for them to speak. *Paul* readily accepts the Motion, and after beckoning for Audience, he briefly runs over many remarkable Things recorded in the sacred History, concerning their Nation, from their Bondage in *Egypt*, to *David's* Advancement to be King over them; whom God raised up to be a great Deliverer and Ruler of his People, and who was a remarkable Type of *Jesus*, the Saviour and King of *Israel*, who
was

was to come of *David's Line*. He then proceeds directly to declare that this promised Saviour was actually come; *John* having first, according to the Prophecy, prepared his Way; and so in a short and comprehensive Method he comes to the great Business which his Heart was chiefly engaged in, viz. to hold forth Salvation to them through this glorious Redeemer. And to move them to a ready Acceptance of these great Blessings, he sets before them the melancholy Example of the Inhabitants and Rulers of *Jerusalem*, who through their Ignorance and Perverseness had condemned and crucified him who came just according to the Prophets Predictions: *For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their Rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the Voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath-Day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.*

WHICH Words, as well as the other Scriptures, were written for our Learning and Admonition, in these Ends of the World. In order therefore to improve them for our Advantage, let us,

I. *Take a brief Survey of the Voices of the Prophets of the Old Testament, which were exactly fulfilled in Jesus.*

II. *Consider the Reason why the Jews did not receive him, though they had so often heard these plain Predictions.*

I. LET

I, LET us take a brief Survey of the Voices of the Prophets of the Old Testament, which were exactly fulfilled in *Jesus*.

AND first, as to that which seemed most puzzling to that People, namely, that real Divinity should be united to Humanity, and for which they condemned him as a Blasphemer, because that he *being a Man should make himself GOD*. Yet how plainly do the Prophets speak to this Point? *Isaiab* speaks of a Virgin's conceiving and bringing forth a Son, whose Name should be called IMMANUEL, which signifies God with us. And he further declares that this Child, should be called—The MIGHTY GOD, the EVERLASTING FATHER.† *Jeremiab* tells of God's raising to *David* a righteous Branch whose Name should be called, The LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.† *Micab* says his Goings forth have been from of Old, from Everlasting;§ and *Zechariab* calls him God's FELLOW.|| All which could never be true of any mere Creature; and yet it is counted Blasphemy, by those who had often heard all this, and much more of the like Nature, for him to assert his God-head.

THEN as to his taking human Nature, He was to come of the Posterity of *Abraham*, and make good the ultimate Reach of the Promise concerning his Seed¶. The Tribe is also foretold:

* *Job*. x. 33, and xix. 7. † *Isa*. vii. 14, and ix. 6.
Mat. i. 23. † *Jer*. xxiii. 5, 6. § *Mic*. v. 2.
 || *Zeck*. xiii. 7. ¶ *Gen*. xvii. 7, and xxii. 18,
Gal. iii. 16.

told: Good old *Jacob*, when he on his Death-Bed blessed his Children concerning Things to come, told them that the Scepter should not depart from *Judah*, nor a Law-giver from between his Feet, until *Shiloh* came, unto whom the Gathering of the People should be.* The Family of *David* is likewise named. He is the *Branch* so often spoken of, to spring from *Jesse* and *David's* Root.† Yea, and *Micah* foretells the Place where he should be born, even *Beth-lehem*‡, the Town of *David's* Nativity. The Region where he chiefly acted in his public Ministry is pointed out, even the Land of *Zebulon* and *Nephtali*, upon the Sea-Coasts in *Galilee*§.

THAT which the *Jews* took great Offence at, viz. the Meanness of his outward Appearance, the Prophets are very plain upon. *He shall grow up as a Root out of a dry Ground: He hath no Form nor Comeliness: He is despised and rejected of Men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief* ||. Our Lord exactly answered these Descriptions; and yet, so blind were that People, that these Proofs of his being the Messiah, they took to be Evidences that he was not.

BUT to pass much that might be observed in his Life, I shall hasten towards his Death. That great Event drawing near, he rides into *Jerusalem* according to the Prophecy, in Triumph, and yet, *lowly sitting upon an Ass, and upon*

a

* *Gen.* xlix. 10. † *Isa.* xi. 1. *Jer.* xxiii. 5.
‡ *Mich.* v. 2. § *Isa.* ix. 1, 2. *Mat.* iv. || *Isa.* liii. 11,

*a Colt the Fole of an Ass**. And entering the Temple, he overturns Things there, and appears so plainly in Word and Deed against their Corruptions, that they could no longer endure him; and yet they could not prevail against him, 'till a professed Friend of his offered to betray him, that the Scripture might be fulfilled; *He that eateth Bread with me, hath lift up his Heel against me*:† The Price which they gave for him is expressly told by the Prophet, namely Thirty Pieces of Silver: And so is the Use that it was afterward put to, even to buy the Potter's Field†. The dreadful Treatment that our Saviour met with from his Persecutors, and his Behaviour under it, is scarce more clearly, or affectingly described by the Evangelists, than by the Prophets. They speak of his Cheeks being smitten, his Face spit upon, his Hands and Feet, yea, and Side pierced. His having Gall and Vinegar given him is foretold; and so is the Soldiers parting his Garments and casting Lots upon his Vesture: The Insults of the *Pharisees* are likewise described. *He trusted on the Lord, let him deliver him, &c.* and so is *Christ's* Meekness as a Lamb under all this. And *David* sets down the very Words which he used on the Cross; *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*§ They shew the quick Dispatch

* *Zech.* ix. 9. *Mat.* xxi. 5. † *Psa.* xli. 9. *Job.* xiii. 18.

† *Zech.* xi. 12, 13. *Mat.* xxvi. 15, and xxvii. 9, 10.

§ *Psa.* xxii. 1, 8, 16, 18, and lxix. 21. *Isa.* l. 6, and liii. 7, 8. *Micb.* v. 1. *Zech.* xii. 10. *Mat.* xxvi. 63, 67, and xxvii. 34, 35, 43, 46.

Dispatch which was made: *He was taken from Prison and from Judgment, and who shall declare his Generation? for he was cut off out of the Land of the Living.* Yet his Soul was not left in Hell, neither did his Flesh see Corruption: But he arose, and also ascended on high, and lead Captivity Captive, &c.*

THESE are some of the *Voices of the Prophets* concerning the Messiah, which the *Jews* were then looking for: And why did not they receive him, when he so exactly answered these Descriptions? The Answer is plain in the Text; therefore we proceed:

II. To consider the Reason why they did not receive him, though they had so often heard these plain Predictions; which was, *Because they knew him not, nor the Voices of the Prophets;* 'twas their Ignorance of God and his Word.

BUT were they really ignorant? Why it seems that they knew so much about the Time of the Messiah's coming, that they were in great Expectation of him about that Season: They knew that he was to be the Son of *David*; and could tell *Herod* that he was to be born in *Bethlehem*†. And they expected that he would be a great Deliverer and Saviour of their People: But their Misery was that they were ignorant of the *spiritual Nature* of these great Things. *They knew him not*; were ignorant of the Nature and Perfections of the Deity. They had not learnt what

* *Psa.* xvi. 10, and lxxviii. 18. *Ast.* ii. 31.

† *Luke* iii. 15. *Mat.* ii. 5, and xxii. 42.

What *Joshua* taught their Fathers, viz. *Ye can not serve the Lord; for he is an holy God**. Nor had such a View of his Holiness as *Isaiab*, which made him cry out, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a Man of unclean Lips, and I dwell in the midst of a People of unclean Lips: For mine Eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts*. And he had a living Application from off God's Altar, to purge away his Sin, in order to his going forth on God's Errand†. No, they did not think their standing to be such before God, but that if they had good Instructions, and good Motives, they might obtain Salvation, without supernatural Help: Hence one of them that discovered a high Esteem of *Christ*, and came kneeling to him; his Inquiry was, *What shall I do that I may inherit eternal Life?*† The Jews had such an Opinion of their Doings, that they did not believe that they needed an Almighty Helper, and therefore stumbled at his asserting his Godhead: And I have often thought that one main Reason why any in these Times deny *Christ's* Divinity, is because they don't see their Case to be so wretched as to want an infinite Saviour.

FURTHER, they knew not the *Voices of the Prophets*; though they read much in the Prophets Writings, they did not understand their Meaning; but formed earthly Conceptions of heavenly Things. Thus, for Instance, when they read of *Christ's* coming as the King of
B *Israel*

* *Josh. xxiv. 19.* † *Isa. vi.* † *Mar. x. 17.*

Israel, they looked for one that would deliver them from their outward Enemies, and raise their Nation above all the Kingdoms round about: Hence the *Pbarisees* demanded of *Jesus*, *When the Kingdom of God should come?* But he replied, *The Kingdom of God cometh not with Observation; neither shall they say lo here, or lo there**. i. e. God's Kingdom comes not with outward Show, like earthly one's, that Observers might say, Lo here comes our King with his Retinue, or there he appears in his Glory. No says our Saviour, *For behold the Kingdom of God is within you*. His Kingdom is of an inward and spiritual Nature.

THE Evangelist *John* sets the Case in a very clear Light; he shews that when *Jesus* came to his own People, they received him not: But those which did receive him, were those, *Which were born not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God*. They being divinely enlightened, *beheld his Glory, the Glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth†*. While others who were trusting in their *Blood* Relation to *Abraham*, and in their *free Will* Power, saw no Form nor Comeliness in him. Thus it appears, that their Ignorance of the Nature and Perfections of the Divine Being, and consequently of their own unlikeness to him, and wretched Condition before him; and so not being sensible of what a Salvation they needed, was the great Cause of their rejecting,

* *Luke* xvii. 20, 21. † *Job*. i. 11, 14.

rejecting, and crucifying the Lord of Glory. Now in these Things, they were willingly, nay, many of them wilfully ignorant, by which they brought upon themselves dreadful Guilt and amazing Ruin: Which shocking Example was justly set forth by the Apostle, as a Warning to the *Jews* at *Antioch*, not to do the like; and it ought likewise seriously to be regarded by each of our Souls: Which may lead us to some particular Improvement of the Hints that have been given. And,

1. How should these Things teach us to prize and regard the holy Scriptures? In them alone is clearly discovered how we have destroyed ourselves, and where our Help is found. The Author, the Nature, and the Glory of our Salvation is there revealed, as the Light of Nature, and all the Wisdom of this World could never have found it out. And as these good News are glorious in themselves; so they are to be depended upon by us. Nothing confirms Prophecy like the exact Accomplishment of the Things predicted. This was the ancient Rule which God gave to *Israel*, to know his Prophets by*. O, how convincing then are the Evidences that we have of the Verity of the Bible! None but Men divinely inspired could tell Hundreds, or Thousands of Years before Hand, so many great Things; yea, and minute Circumstances too, concerning the Birth, Life and Death of our Saviour, as were written by the

* Deut. xviii. 22.

the Prophets, and are testified by the Apostles, and many other Witnesses, in the New Testament*. And as certainly as those Things which were spoken concerning Christ's Obedience and Sufferings are accomplished, so surely will all that is said about the *Glory which should follow* be fulfilled: Yea, every Promise, and every Threatening in God's sacred Book, shall finally take Place in their full Extent, to the eternal Glory of the Divine Being, and the complete Happiness or Misery of all the human Race. O, what Madness then are all such guilty of, who disregard and run on contrary to the divine Oracles in their Lives and Conversations! Such Behaviour is like running upon the Point of a Sword, to which God's Word is frequently compared. To such I would cry, as *Paul* did to the Jailor, *Do thyself no Harm*†.

2. HENCE, see the Necessity of the Aids of the divine Spirit, in order to understand and improve the Scriptures as we ought. Many now, as well as formerly, are forward to cry up human Reason and Accomplishments; and to look

* Here let me observe, that Dr. *Gill* in his Exposition of the New-Testament, has clearly shewn from the ancient *Jewish* Writings, that while they shew their Blasphemy and Malice against *Christ*, they undesignedly give their Testimony to many Facts concerning him: For they own that there was such a Person as *Jesus*, or *Jesu* (as they in Contempt call him) the Son of *Mary*, the Wife of *Joseph*; that he was born in *Bethlehem*; that he was once in *Egypt*; that

† *Act.* xvi. 28.

look upon such as have not a large Share thereof, as Persons incapable of understanding and improving the sacred Writings aright. [*This People who knoweth not the Law are cursed**] But that Saying remains as true now as heretofore, *The World by Wisdom knew not God*: And that if any Man seemeth to be wise in this World, he must become a Fool, in order to be truly wise †. i. e. He must be sensible of, and acknowledge his own Ignorance and Folly before God, and gladly yield to and embrace the Teachings and Influences of the Holy Spirit: That Spirit of Truth which guides into all Truth ‡. Saint Stephen sums up the fatal Error of the Jews thus, *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in Heart and Ears, ye do always resist the HOLY GHOST: As your Fathers did, so do ye§.*

THE Necessity and Importance of the Help of the Divine Spirit, may further appear from two Considerations.

FIRST, From the Imperfection of the Ideas which we form concerning Things that we are not

that he lived many Years in *Nazareth*, and hence they frequently call him a *Nazarene*. They mention *John* the Baptist: They speak of *Judas*'s betraying of him; and that when his Disciples saw he was taken, they ran away. They say the Elders of *Jerusalem* smote him with Whips, and put a Crown of Thorns upon his Head, and that he was put to Death because he was nigh to the Kingdom. These, with some other Things they mention, though they would represent him to be the worst of Men.

* *Job.* vii. 49. † *1 Cor.* i. 21, and iii. 18.

‡ *Job.* xvi. 13. § *Acts* vii. 51.

not acquainted with. How rarely do any Persons find Places, Persons or Things to agree with the Conceptions which they have formed of them from verbal or written Descriptions ! And if our Apprehensions are so dull about *earthly* Things, that are out of the Circle of our particular Acquaintance ; how confused and false will our Notions be of *heavenly* Things, without the Teachings of the *Holy Ghost* ! The Reason why the natural Man cannot know them, is, because they are *spiritually discerned* : The Apostle uses a very striking Similitude to illustrate this Case, *For, says he, what Man knoweth the Things of a Man, save the Spirit of Man which is in him ? even so the Things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God**. Which shews that his Teachings are as needful for the true Knowledge of the Things of God, as the Use of our intellectual Powers are in order to be conscious of Things within us.

SECONDLY. The Wise give wrong Judgment when their Minds are byaled. *A Gift doth blind the Eyes of the Wise, and pervert the Words of the Righteous†*. Now Pride, Self-Love, Self-Interest, the Frowns or Favors of the World, and Abundance of other Things, like Fogs, arise often in the Mind to prevent a just View of Things : Nay, says the Apostle James, *Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, the Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to Envy ?* What then is the Remedy against this great Evil ? Why, He

* 1 Cor. ii. 11.

† Deut. xvi. 19.

He giveth more Grace; wherefore he saith, God resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble.*

3. If the Influences and In-dwelling of the holy Spirit is so needful for all; how essentially necessary must it be for a Gospel Minister? The Teachers of the Jewish Church were (at least some of them) Men of no small Capacities and Acquirements: CHRIST calls them the *Wise and prudent*†. But their Hearts not being right with God, the greater their Gifts, the more Mischief they did; and so it generally proves to be with such Men, in all Generations.—

Among many Things that might be named to illustrate this Point, I shall fix upon this, viz. Ministers are *Christ's Ambassadors*, to treat with Souls in his Name about being reconciled to God†. Well, should any Person now, when a Treaty is proposed, to labor for to reconcile the Powers at War, advance this as a Rule, that in making choice of Ambassadors to act for our King and Nation in these great Affairs, that if any Persons can be found who have large Gifts, and are well versed in the Languages, History, and political Affairs of the Nations concerned, then 'tis no essential Thing, whether in Heart they are Friends to our Nation or to its Enemies§. How would such a one be
looked

§ Here note, that I speak nothing against human Learning in itself, but only of the Place some give it; and to use the Comparison

* James iv. 5, 6. † Mat. xi. 25. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 20.

looked upon, and treated? I believe I need not answer; others would do it fast enough. And what Reason can be given why supreme Love to *Christ* and his Cause, is not as necessary in his Ambassadors as in King *George's*?

SHOULD it be said that a Person may have a good moral Character, and a Desire to promote others' Salvation, though he be not regenerated himself. I reply, that our Lord declares, that *He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad**. All are either real Friends or Enemies to *Christ*, and those who don't view the Case to be so, have not true Ideas of the Controversy which subsists between God and Man; and therefore are very unfit Persons to have the Ministry of Reconciliation committed to them.—But say many, “we can't know who are converted, and who not; for God only searcheth the Heart.” ANSWER. He only sees what the inward Dispositions of Mens Minds are towards our King and Nation, as well as towards Heaven; but will any argue from thence that we can't know who are our Friends, and who not?—It will likely be reply'd, that indeed we may form a Judgment sufficient to act upon; yet possibly we may be mistaken after all. Well, when that is allowed, still how is it improved? Why, in civil and

Comparison that Mr. *Keach* did, eighty Years ago: Human Learning may be a good Hand-maid to Religion; but if like *Hagar*, she must needs be Mistress, then cast her out.

* *Mat. xii. 30.*

and political Concerns, the Danger of being imposed upon, makes Men more careful; so that if there are Counterfeits abroad, they don't conclude that they'll take no more Money; nor on the other Hand, that they'll take all that comes: No; but they look more critically after the distinguishing Marks of the true Coin: And why will not Men be as wise about Things spiritual and heavenly? I know no better Reason for it than this, *viz.* That Things below have more Place and deeper Influence, generally, on Men's Minds, than Things above. And I wish there was no Reason to complain, even in this Land of Gospel Light, that some who claim the Power of introducing Men into the Ministry; yet neglect even to examine their Candidates whether they are regenerated or no; as though that was so small a Part of their Qualifications, that it was not worth inquiring after. *Be astonished O ye Heavens at this!*

4. HENCE see something of the Cause why *Jesus* in his spiritual coming, is often treated by many Professors of Christianity, much as his Person was by the *Jews*; namely, because their Eyes are blinded as to the Nature of spiritual Things, so that when God appears to work effectually for the Salvation of Souls, they make strange of it, or boldly fight against it; and yet think that they would not appear against a good Work, no more than the *Jews* thought they would in *Christ's* Time. *Job. x. 33.*

MANY when they read, that *God hath chosen the foolish Things of the World to confound the Wise, yea, and the weak, base and despised Things of the World, hath he chosen to the End, That no Flesh should glory in his Presence**: They readily allow that 'twas right for him to deal thus in those Times, because that the *Jewish* Leaders, and *Gentile* Philosophers, had a very false Conceit of their own Wisdom and Goodness: But they do not suppose any other but that their Opinion of themselves is just, and can't think that *Christ* will make Use of Instruments and Means, now to promote his Cause, which look *foolish, weak and despicable* in their Eyes. Just so the *Pharisees* of old looked upon the Conduct of their Fathers. *Mat. xxiii. 29,-31.* Which should be a Warning to us all to beware of Self-Conceit.

PRESIDENT *Edwards* observed twenty Years ago, in his Thoughts which he published, of the Work of God then in *New-England*, that the Error of those that opposed the Work (where their Error lay in the Understanding, and not in the Disposition) consisted chiefly in these three Things, viz.

1. *In their judging of the Work, by the Means and Manner of its being introduced, and not by the Nature of the Work itself.*

2. *In their not making the Scriptures their only Rule to try it by.* And,

3. *Their*

* 1 Cor. i. 27,-29.

3. *Their not distinguishing between the Good and the Bad; but condemning All, because they found some Things wrong.*

AND he observes that many make use of History, old Customs, if not their own Experiences too, as Rules to judge of the Work by, instead of the divine Oracles.

THESE Observations I think are undeniable in themselves, and are also as worthy of Notice now, as then; which was one Cause of my setting of them down here; and another was, because of what I have heard and seen of late.

AFTER great Declensions and Stupidity, and the awful prevailing of Iniquity in our Land, the Lord has been pleased in infinite Mercy to revive his Work in various Places*: And yet great Numbers both of Ministers and People, treat it either with Disregard, or Opposition; notwithstanding the Evidences of its being a divine Work are such as these: Namely, Many that formerly scarce shewed any Regard to Religion, and rarely attended public Worship,
now

* Particularly in *Middleborough*; and the Borders of some Towns adjoining; where the Work began last *May*, and has prevailed so far, that not less than Threescore have been thought to be converted since then. I am not so unacquainted with Mankind as to be insensible how ready many are to say, "You don't know who are converted, &c." But, I shall beg Leave to reply, in the Words of the late President *Davies*, when speaking of the Work in *Virginia*, viz. "I claim no *Infallibility*; but I must not
" under

now rarely neglect any stated or occasional Opportunity to hear the Gospel preached; great Numbers of young People who were before bent upon Vanity, now shew more Engagement and Delight in religious Exercises, public and private, than ever they did in their *merry Meetings*:---Some intemperate Persons are become sober and regular in their Conduct; many that were inordinately bent after the World, are brought to lament their Folly in pursuing earthly Things in neglect of heavenly; Numbers which had old Grudges are reconciled, &c.

THOSE who are looked upon to be converted, though many Circumstances of their Change are very various; yet all agree in acknowledging the Purity and Strictness of the divine Law, and that their Hearts as well as Lives have been filled with Sin, and from thence give in to the Justice of God in their Condemnation: And hold their Justification to be intirely by *Christ's* Righteousness, received by Faith: Yet a View of that is so far from making them careless in their

“ under the modest Pretence of renouncing it, scruple a
 “ Matter attested with all possible Evidences, and so rush
 “ into *Scepticism*. If I could form no Judgment of so
 “ public a Work, I would renounce my Function this
 “ Moment; for with what Face can I pretend to promote
 “ a divine Work in the Conversion of Men, if I cannot
 “ have any *satisfying* Knowledge of it, when it appears.”

—State of Dissenters in *Virginia*, p. 28, printed at *Boston*, 1751. Something of the same Work that has been among us, has appeared lately in *Reboboth, Attleborough, Coventry, Norwich, Lyme, Brimfield, Enfield, Suffield*, and some other Places.

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their Behaviour, that they discover an earnest Desire to know and conform to all *Christ's* Commands and Ordinances; they shew much Love to God's People, earnest Concern for the Salvation of Souls, and the like. Indeed I am far from thinking that there has been no Intermixture of Things that are not good; though from the most careful Observations that I have been able to make, I really believe that this Work has been more clear from such Things than the Work was twenty-one Years ago: Particularly, the Impressions that have been made, either of a sorrowful or joyful Nature, have been more upon the Understanding, and less on the Imagination, now than then: Hence, I have heard of no *Trances* among us; also, Christians have been more solemn in their Joys, and less bitter in their Zeal, than in the former Work. Nay, the Case is so clear, that I should not be afraid to defy all Men to shew fuller Proofs of that's being the Work of God's Spirit which prevailed then in the Land, than have appeared among us in the Year past; unless they think this to be so, *to wit*. That the Instruments and Subjects of that Work were more accounted of in the World than these now; and if that be the Case, then I would only desire such to look back again upon the *Jews'* Conduct towards CHRIST, and take Warning.

SOME, I know are ready to say, "Don't go so fast, but wait and see how Things will turn out." As if when, *The Day-spring from on high*
batb

*batb visited us**; it could not be known from the Night till afterwards, or as if such heavenly Visitations are not to be acknowledged and rejoiced in till we know how others will improve them. The *Jews* waited to see how Things would turn out, and what did they find: Why, they see many that followed *Christ* for a While, forsake him? They saw one betray him, and others deny him, &c. And then they were confirmed that it was all a Delusion; and, O Soul! dost thou covet their Lot? God had said long before, *I will choose their Delusions, and will bring their Fears upon them; because when I called none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: But they did Evil before mine Eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.*† Canst thou read this, delaying Soul, and not tremble? When God called they chose not to regard; and he left them to be deluded and perish. O, therefore embrace the first Calls without Delay!

ONCE more :

5. OUR Subject may inform us of one main Reason why Mens Practice often contradicts their Profession; namely, because they are ignorant of the Nature of the Principles they profess, or at least don't duly view them in their Conduct. And alas! how full is the World of such Things? I shall name a few Instances.

PROTESTANTS in general, profess that the Scriptures are the only perfect Rule to decide all Controversies; and yet we often find, that

* *Luke i. 78.* † *Isa. lxvi. 4.*

that when any Principle or old Custom is brought into Dispute, Recourse is presently had to the old Fathers, and if a Number of good Men on one Side, and bad ones on the other can be reckoned up, the Scale is presently turned, and the Point decided. Indeed, I am far from slighting pious Predecessors, but would follow them as far as they did *Christ*; yet to make use of them as Authorities sufficient to shut off any clear Light from the divine Oracles, which they did not see, is really to injure their Characters, as well as our own Souls.

AGAIN, 'tis generally held that all Saints are imperfect in this Life; and yet, if a Person who has profest to have the In-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, happens to have his Judgment altered afterwards in any Point in Religion, I have heard that Promise, *The Spirit of Truth will guide you into all Truth**, improved as an Evidence that either they had not the Spirit then, or else were in an Error now; which is as much as to say, that when a Person is under the Operation of the Divine Spirit, his Judgment is then perfect; yea, and that he must never have any more Reformation in Principles. All that the Spirit teaches, is Truth; but he does not teach us all Truth at once; for the Just walk in that Path that *shines more and more unto the perfect Day†*.

How often have we seen Persons that would cry out at others assuming God's Prerogative in searching the Heart, when perhaps they had

no

* *John xvi. 13.* † *Prov. iv. 18.*

no better Ground for their Charge, than only the Person's dealing plainly with others for Evils that they discovered; and yet they very soon would not stick to declare that those which they complained of were deluded by the Devil!

PRIDE is generally condemned in Word, and if any who were not introduced into the Ministry in the common Way of the Land, attempt to preach the Gospel, many are ready to say to them as *Elieb* did to *David*, *I know thy Pride, and the Naughtiness of thine Heart**; but they don't seem to suspect that Pride moves them to claim the Prerogative of introducing whom they think proper, and of forbidding all that follow not them, though it was that Principle which made *Christ's* Disciples attempt such a Practice formerly†. Nay, according to the Behaviour of many in these Things, it looks as though they thought that Youths being pampered up at College, and then being set over large Congregations, and to live in a great Deal of worldly Grandeur, secured them from being *lifted up with Pride*; and then falling into the Condemnation of the Devil, † more than other Men. The ancient Exhortation to every Man, was *Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every Man the Measure of Faith§*. But now let a Man have never so much Knowledge of the Doctrines of Faith, or Experience of the Grace of Faith, and preach never so clearly; yea, and

* 1 Sam. xvii. 28. † Mar. ix. 33, &c.

† 1 Tim. iii. 6. § Rom. xii. 3.

and with never so much Success too; yet if he is not introduced in the Way mentioned above, how many are there that think they have sufficient Warrant to reject him?

WHILE I am writing of these Things, I can (as it were) hear some say, "Take Care, you will bring the Ministry into Contempt?" I answer no, I would fain secure them from it, by labouring for a Reformation; for I believe each one will find that Saying true; sooner or later, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted**. And God's Dealings towards his People in New-England for twenty Years back, have been wonderfully calculated, like his Dispensations towards Israel in the Wilderness, *To humble them; and to prove them, to know what was in their Heart, whether they would keep his Commandments or no*†.

THEREFORE to proceed,

How many have there been among us, who have profest to have such Love to Christ and his Cause, that they would die for him, rather than deny him; who yet have acted quite otherwise when Trials came on? But there is no End to enumerate Particulars, no Sect, nor Order of Men, are free of this dreadful Evil, of saying one Thing and doing another; though some are much more guilty of it than others: And the Consideration hereof, is enough to *abase* all Flesh before God. And before I leave

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this

* Luke xiv. 11:

† Dent. viii. 2:

this Head, let me observe, that there is one Sort of People who strangely think themselves free of this Charge, of saying one Thing and practising another, because they don't profess Religion at all. They will exclaim at a high Rate against the Hypocrisy of Professors, and declare that they would not be guilty of mocking God as they do, upon no Account. Now here seems to be an Acknowledgment of the Divine Omniscience, and a Regard to Uprightness before him; and yet, at the same Time, they don't so much as pretend to regard his Authority, nor submit to his Government. Thus a professed Regard to God, makes them disregard him; and while they explode Deceit and Self-Righteousness, sadly discover Marks of both: For while the *Pharisee* tells of his Fastings and Performances, these boast of their honest Hearts, and I believe many of them depend as much upon their *Honesty*, as others do upon their *Duties*. But are they really honest? They say they abhor Self-Righteousness, and it seems that they would not pretend to pray to God, because their Prayers would not be acceptable; that is, they will not come to him, because they find no Good in themselves to bring. What amazing Things are here! Here are Men that would not mock God, and yet live in open Contempt of his Service; they say they have honest Hearts, but will not so much as confess their Iniquities to him, whom they have provoked, nor seek his Mercy. O Heaven-daring Madness!

THUS

THUS it appears, that Men are so far from avoiding Inconsistencies, by disregarding Religion, that they involve themselves the deeper in Confusion and Guilt, and run in the high Road to eternal Ruin; while Professors are far from being excusable, in not practising agreeable to their Profession. But one Way of Peace and Happiness therefore remains, which is to fly to the Blood of *Christ*, to *purge our Consciences from dead Works*, that we may *serve the living God*; and so to abide in him as the Branch does in the Vine, that we may bring forth much Fruit†.

BEFORE I conclude, I would set down a few Words of Advice, to my own Soul as well as others, which if rightly regarded, will afford much Help against the Evils mainly spoken of in this Discourse.

1st. LET us meditate much upon the Perfections of God, especially his Omniscience and Omnipresence; that he fills all Places, and sees all Things. A realizing View hereof, will wonderfully guard the Soul against all Deceit, as well as other Vices. When *David* had been devoutly contemplating upon these Things, it led him to renounce the Ways of wicked Men, and to cry to God to *search* his Heart and Thoughts, and see if there was any Way of Wickedness in him, and *lead him in the Way everlasting*†.

2^d. LET

• *Heb. ix. 14.* † *John xv.* † *Psa. cxxxix.*

2d. LET us often review our Ways, and compare our Profession and Practice together; and endeavour to set ourselves as Spectators, critically to observe how our Conduct may appear to others. But because Self is so apt to blind us; therefore,

3d. LET us prize and improve the faithful Reproofs of our Fellow-Christians. When the Man after God's own Heart, had been crying to the Lord, that his Lips and Heart might be kept from wicked Works, as believing Prayer engages the Soul to wait for an Answer, in the Way of using the best Means to obtain the Thing requested; so he names this as a great Help in the Case, *viz. Let the Righteous smite me, it shall be a Kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent Oil which shall not break my Head**. Solomon tells us, that open Rebuke is better than secret Love; while he that hates Reproof is brutish, and shall die†.

UPON the Whole, since the Jews trusted upon their outward Privileges, and rested in their outward Forms, and thought, because of them, that their Case was safe, though their Hearts and Lives were contrary thereto; but were so far mistaken, that for these Things, and their rejecting the Saviour, they brought upon themselves and Posterity, such Woes as never befel any other People: May our Souls take effectual
Warning,

* *Psal. cxli. 3, 5.* † *Prov. xxvii. 5; and xii. 1; and xv. 10.*

Warning, not to rest in any Thing short of a Union with, and Conformity to *Jesus Christ*.

AND by all Means let us take Heed, that we do not treat this heavenly Friend as the *Jews* did heretofore. His coming is always contrary to Nature: The Prophet puts the Question in old Time thus, *Who may abide the Day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a Refiner's Fire, and like Fuller's Soap**. But shall we regard our Dross and Filth, more than his Presence and Blessings? No, but may all set open Doors that the KING OF GLORY may come in. *A M E N.*

* *Mal. iii. 2.*



To fill a vacant Page, here is inserted a Hymn,
from Mr. WALLIN'S Evangelical Hymns, just
re-printed in Boston.

1 **B**Eware, my Soul, the Tempter's Train;
He takes his Circuit round,
And first tries small Sins, glad to gain
Tho' but an Inch of Ground.

2 If his Device shall once prevail
To captivate the Mind,
His second Wile will scarcely fail
Greater Success to find.

3 He is thy Enemy avow'd;
His Aim is to devour:
A Duty left, a Sin allow'd,
Is his successful Hour.

4 The Place thy Follies to him give
Will Pain and Sorrow cost;
Tho' Grace from *Christ* thou shalt receive
To balance what is lost.

5 The Serpent's Craft is by Degrees
On Hypocrites to gain,
Till in their foul Apostacies
He can all Ends obtain.

6 Sin once indulg'd pollutes the Heart,
And breaks the Bonds of Peace;
The holy Spirit will depart,
Divine Communion cease.

7 Then, O my Soul, thy Ground maintain;
Courageously resist;
If steadfast thou thy Faith retain,
The Tempter will desist.

8 For Satan flies the Christian Shield;
Nor can his Sword endure:
By Faith stand fast; O never yield;
Thy Conquest is secure.

F I N I S.

